SCINTILLATING RAIN

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The thorn, collection of short stories, 1982

A little mountain of dreams, short story, 1983

A dagger lives in the rain, poetry collection, 1988

Mother, I have a recipe for bread, poetry collection, Alekton publications, 1997

The hot air balloon conspiracy, short story, Mikro Pezo magazine, Haramada publications, 2014

Sea girl, poetry collection, poésie farouche publications, 2017

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George Mathopoulos

Scintillating Rain

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by Avgoustinos Touloupis

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George Mathopoulos was born in Athens, Greece. He migrated to Sweden where he lived for several years and worked as a French and Greek language teacher. He studied Ethnology, Comparative Literature and French Literature at Umeå Universitet. Many of his poems have been translated into French and English. He works as a literary translator.

Avgoustinos Touloupis is someone who grew up in several parts of the world and never figured out what he wanted to be when he grew up. He studied English Literature and Mass Communication in Boston. He has worked as a journalist, translator, artist and photographer.

To the Wilund family
of Gåsholma, Sweden

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Manuel's Ring

I traveled a great deal during the mid-1980s and each season held for me a magic interwoven with the people I met. I would arrive by train in a city and wander through its streets, whether it was raining or snowing, and I would search around every corner for a special image, a gaze, a song. I was often alone through no conscious effort on my part. Along with the air, I inhaled the images, the gazes and songs of the city.

One sun-drenched autumn day in 1985 I arrived by train in Amsterdam. I walked through the city center's narrow streets, observing the canals, the bridges and the houses, and admiring the cyclists. Most of all I admired the haughty Dutch women. In the evening I found accommodation in

a hostel. It had some basic amenities, more reminiscent of a country hotel in the Balkans. There I met Manuel, a blond Spaniard from Madrid. We chatted every day about life in our homelands, about our dreams and our travels. I called him by his name but he liked to call me “Greco”. Manuel slept on one of the bunks in the dreary hall on the second floor of the hostel. The first floor was reserved for women. I was separated from Manuel by a corridor across which bleary-eyed young men would shuffle every morning, most of them sullen and silent, others grinning strangely for reasons known only to themselves. The corridor was a crossing for creatures who touched each other with hesitant looks.

One morning Manuel discovered that his wallet had been stolen. The night before he had hidden it under his pillow. He asked me to help him find it, even if it was empty. We went into the bathroom and toilets on our floor and searched every corner. To no avail. We went downstairs and had something to eat. He was upset yet he managed to smile, not so much with his lips as with his eyes. He had a train ticket to Madrid stashed in his backpack and decided to leave the next

day. We checked out of the hostel and took a long walk around town. The previous day I had bought hashish from a coffee shop and when we got near the Van Gogh Museum I stood on the sidewalk, rolled a joint and slipped it in my shirt pocket. We entered the museum and were dazzled by the vibrancy of Van Gogh's paintings. I remember Manuel's movement, how he walked, the way he caressed the colors of the canvases with his gaze.

By the time we left the museum it was already noon. Manuel removed the silver ring he was wearing and offered it to me. "Greco, this is for you. I want to thank you for treating me to such a hearty meal." I thanked him but refused to accept it, telling him there was no sense in parting with his ring. We walked to the nearby park and sat on a bench with grass beneath our feet and trees all around us. I took out my passport and placed it next to me, between myself and Manuel. I gently pulled the joint out of my shirt pocket and placed it on the passport. Manuel was looking ahead, half closing his eyes. He was probably annoyed at the light flooding the park. It was as if the sun had come to a standstill just above the trees that surrounded us. We were an infinitesi-

mal piece of nature on the canvas of a persistent and jesting painter about whom we knew next to nothing. The painter was waiting for the sun to bind its rays and hurl them at us. It was an inhuman design, and as for us, all we felt was the ripple of a deep blue sky. I gave Manuel the joint to light, but he refused, shaking his head. "Greco," he told me, "I can't smoke hash, I have another girlfriend today." He took some paraphernalia out of his jacket pocket that would help him meet his other girlfriend. It took him a while to warm up the spoon. Moments before shooting up he said to me: "Greco, I want you to promise me that you will never try heroin." From inside the park, two policemen on their horses approached and slowly passed in front of us without looking at us. Hating the park, I smoked the joint by myself.

The years tumbled by. Even a rainbow of emotions is destined to fade but I remember the red clouds that gave shape to Manuel's lips, his eyes and the faint wrinkles around them, and I think that some eyes remain indelibly inside us, whether or not we possess the ring they had offered us.

Shooting Stars

I met him in my twenties. They called him Antonis. They called me whatever you prefer to call me since I am confessing to the honorable assembly of which you are an integral part.

Antonis was a tireless conversationalist, incurably in love with words, authentically steeped in the nuances of the expressions of everyday life.

Yet, life has its sorrows.
Life has its battles.
Life has its miracles.

It was a night like any other, which is to say, completely different. Antonis was walking with me in a park and talking about the art of montage and the peculiarities of decoupage. It was our favorite subject at the time. A shooting star made its

brief appearance but we only noticed it because it fell to the ground between us. We stared at it in awe as it slowly faded into the merciless ground. The shooting star was dead.

Antonis was inconsolable. From that night on he began to slur his words and to lose the second person singular. His problem centered on verbs.

"I explained to you what happened yesterday, but I don't know if I understood it," he told me the following day.

"Maybe I understood it, maybe I can explain it to you," I said to him.

"No, the point is for me to feel it deeply you, have I understood?"

The problem was that Antonis didn't realize what had happened to him.

I liked him, and for this reason I engaged in the investigation of his peculiar problem. I consulted a volume of astronomy at the National Library, re-read Einstein's Theory of Relativity, and sauntered across countless kilometers through streets and parks looking for dead shooting stars.

I didn't find a single one.

"Shooting stars aren't what they used to be," I thought for some nights as I gazed intently at the

sky. Every now and then I saw one, or thought I did. It was always a fleeting glimmer. It was the faint hope of a fleeting glimmer.

Years passed and Antonis found the second person singular again. One day when we met he said to me:

"The first years were of course difficult, because I didn't even realize that I had a problem. Once I realized that, I started fighting it. I got well, but no matter how you manage it, there's always a price to pay. I can no longer look up and face the night sky. If I do, I may never be able to speak again."

I thought how lucky he was.

I think how lucky he is.

If he looks at the night sky, he will find that the falling stars no longer travel to Earth. He'll be disappointed. It's possible I could be wrong. Maybe the night sky doesn't want to reveal itself to me. Perhaps the fleeting flashes appear to those who do not go hunting for them.

Scintillating Rain

I first saw the Scintillating Rain on a Sunday in May of 1972. It was a hot day but the roses in our garden had their dewdrops keeping them company until the late morning.

It was a strange time. I looked like a boy who had lost his mother but knew that she was alive, alluring, the daughter of an unknown sea.

Our house was in Nea Smyrni, on a street that was lined along its entire length by single-family homes. The sidewalks were wide, full of pine trees. On Sundays, a friend of my father's, his comrade from the time of their exile on the island of Gyaros, used to come to our garden. The two men drank their coffee, talked, looked at the rosebushes and the turtle that frolicked in our garden,

and whenever they were in a good mood they exchanged anti-Junta jokes. That Sunday they were talking about Palestine and Israel and I listened carefully. They only fell silent when they caught sight of a girl walking past the garden. On the opposite sidewalk was a young man sitting on the grass beside the trunk of a pine tree. He began to whistle at the girl who continued on her way without paying him any attention.

My father looked at me, and said, "We never whistle at women."

I remember well the question I put to him: "Don't we even whistle at the women we like?"

His friend answered before he did: "We like all women."

"We love all women," my father chimed in.

I was struck by their responses and they got me thinking. The two men resumed their talk of politics, and when my father's friend was gone, we set out for Sounio.

We stopped a few kilometers before the ancient temple, left the car on the side of the road, and climbed a pine-covered hill.

"And now we will play war, since I promised you we would," said my father. We stood among the

tall pines and bushes, and he explained to me how we would play. He always did that. Every Ash Monday he would tell me where and how we would fly the kite, and then he wouldn't let go of the line. When we played war we got along much better because I was directly involved in the play-acting.

"Well... I'll be an SS officer, and you'll be a partisan. I'm going to go hide, and you must find me and capture or kill me. Otherwise I will capture you. I might even kill you."

The good thing about my father was that he never assigned me the role of SS officer.

I saw him walking towards the top of the hill and in a few minutes lost sight of his white shirt, which at first was clearly visible against the background of the green forest.

I was very careful. I took advantage of my small size. I crept into the bushes. I was silent, a true partisan, with a broken branch for a weapon. I knew my father was cunning. I imagined him sitting comfortably in a bush, waiting for me to do all the work, approaching him without seeing him, and then, wham!, he'd let me have it. I felt very lucky when I spotted part of his shirt behind a bush. I decided I shouldn't attack him head on.

I hid behind a pine tree, grabbed a stone, and threw it over the bush. The shot was high, flawless. My goal was to get him to turn to where the stone would fall. I ran to the bush, raised my gun, and shouted, "Hands up!"

"Hands up!" my father cried and scared the living daylights out of me. He was right behind me, naked from the waist up, covered in sweat.

I recovered from my shock, but felt disappointment. It had not occurred to me that he might leave his shirt on the branches of a bush. My father was a master of deception.

As we made our way back down to the road he explained my mistake with a single sentence: "Never lose sight of the adversary."

It was the last time we played war.

We enjoyed the sunset from the temple of Poseidon. And when the sun went down, a gray cloud above the Legraina beach let all its love fall on the sea and the land. The sea turned purple and the land took on an emerald color. It was the first time I was seeing the Scintillating Rain. I would only see it again after many years, in the same place, and it would water me, and fill me with its colors, and I would love it.

We were soaked by the time we got into the car. I settled into the passenger seat and we made our way back, silent but happy.

"What have you gathered from today?" he asked me just before we reached home. It was my father's classic question at the end of an all-day excursion.

I looked at him. I didn't know what to say.

"It can't be. You must have picked something up. We did so many things."

"What you told me about women... that we love them all," I told him.

He looked at me, smiled, and said, "Yes, we love them all, and we never lose sight of the adversary."

In the constellation of Tadeusz Borowski

I am inside the broken mirror
I don't know whether you broke it
or whether I broke it

for years I have been expressing with my verses
what was left over

there is no reason to forgive myself
and there is much less reason
for you to forgive me

I eavesdropped on the fabric
of your being

I scented your breath

I was driving away the veil
behind which you hid your dreams

I was only writing
to relieve my feelings

some verses you liked some you didn't like

but it doesn't matter
what you like and what you don't

what matters is that you feel happy

to bind and untie your loves

to memorize and to contemplate

to remember and to forget
the moments you lived
the moments you didn't live
the day when you displayed courage
the night when you cowered
the day when you made love in the sea
the night when the anchor of your boat
ran aground on a reef

have you heard of Tadeusz Borowski?

his breath was the breath of the poet
who cannot distinguish wings from feelings

I don't know if the swallows made nests
on the roof of his house

I know his sea glistened
in the moonlight

I don't know why Borowski
wrote poems

one day he brought to light
This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen
a prosaic contract with life

for many years I tried to understand
what prompted him to write it

did he perhaps want to reveal
what happened at Auschwitz?

certainly
I say
only this certitude is not enough for me

Borowski saw people
eating spilled brains

the Nazis
let thousands of prisoners starve

one day they shot many of them in the head

hungry and exhausted prisoners
ran to the corpses
and began to devour them

a fellow prisoner of Borowski's
admitted to him
that the human brain is delicious

Borowski recounts this soberly

I don’t know if you are concerned about the issue
you might want to look at it
out of the corner of your eye
I guess you see a lot of things
out of the corner of your eye
it’s a good attitude
a way to keep the neurons of the brain
from becoming overburdened

Borowski lived until 1951

his friends had been trying since 1945
to persuade him to deal with post-war Poland

Borowski kept silent and wrote

until one day he found himself
inside a broken mirror
he didn’t know whether he had broken it himself

there was no reason to forgive himself

and there was much less reason
for others to forgive him

for so many years he had eavesdropped
on the fabric of their being

the same way he had eavesdropped
on the woman who shot the sergeant
outside the gas chamber
she managed to grab the pistol from his belt
as he pulled down his trousers
to rape her
my God, what did I do for her
to shoot me?
said the sergeant before he died

Borowski recounts this soberly

he scented the breath of his fellow humans

he was driving away the veil
behind which they hid their dreams

but now the end has come
Borowski said one day
there is no reason to persist any longer

and he he turned the gas valve all the way

I will not imitate Borowski
because I was by his side
the moment he was leaving
and I promised him I would uncover
the trail of the woman who killed the sergeant
I would begin with her life in the camp
and reach all the way to her star

and I found her
I saw the moments she lived
the day when she made love
in the sea
the day when she displayed courage

you might not like this story

but it doesn't matter what you like
and what you don't

what matters is that you feel happy

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